

Review of: Brysbaert, A., Klinkenberg, V., Gutiérrez García-M., A. & Vikatou, I. (eds.) (2018). *Constructing monuments, perceiving monumentality and the economics of building. Theoretical and methodological approaches to the built environment*. Leiden: Sidestone Press. – Hardback and paperback, 342 pp., 46 illus. (bw), 40 illus. (fc). ISBN: 9-789-088906-96-1 Open Access: <https://www.sidestone.com/books/constructing-monuments>

Marta Lorenzon

Constructing monuments, perceiving monumentality and the economics of building is an insightful new publication that delves deeply into the current challenges of conducting research on building archaeology, and especially the impact of energetics studies on the analysis of the construction process. In recent years, the question of monumentality in building archaeology has become once again a primary topic of discussion by offering new insights to understand the socio-economic impact of the construction process on past communities (see also OSBORNE, 2014; TRIGGER, 1990).

This book inserts itself well into this trend and elaborates on the concept of monumentality and energetics to open new lines of enquiry into the socio-cultural cost of monumental architecture and the relationship between architecture, natural resources and labour organization well-exemplified in some effective case studies. Ann Brysbaert in her introductory contribution (*Construction monuments, perceiving monumentality: introduction*) creates a compelling and well-defined setting, which outlines the book's aims and objectives, and briefly describes the background work of the volume, which is grounded on multiple conferences and workshops that have taken place in the last three years. Then, she guides the readers through some of the key concepts developed in the articles, such as the connection between monumentality and social and political status in prehistoric and historical societies, the impact of a monumental construction process on communities, and its socio-anthropological influence, regulated by the communities' everyday experience of the aforementioned monumental architecture. Finally, she distinctly explains the ways in which these concepts apply to her own case study, SETinSTONE, which focuses on monumental building activities during the Late Bronze Age Greece. This chapter is not only a captivating introduction creating a multi-layered framework for the subsequent contributions, but also a theoretical outline as buildings and communities are both introduced as active agents of these studies.

The volume is composed by 14 chapters authored by scholars representing a good combination

of emerging and well-known researchers in the field of building archaeology and architectural energetics. The contributions cover a wide historical range moving from the Neolithic to historical periods, different architectural techniques (i.e. stone construction, fired bricks, earthen construction), although they present a more limited geographical variety as the case studies are mainly set in Europe (Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland and UK), US and Mexico. As a whole the volume is a precious contribution, grounded on the theory and methods from architectural energetics and building archaeology. Furthermore, the high quality of the contributions manages to make a convincing case for the need of interdisciplinarity in the analysis of monumental architecture. Structurally, the volume is divided into three main parts: the first one reviews theoretical and practical consideration on the concept of monumentality. The second focuses on diverse methodological approaches to the study of architecture, while the third one discusses in details architectural energetics methods applied to diverse past communities.

In the first part, the discussion concentrates on the significance that as archaeologists we assign to monumentality, presenting multiple case studies that addressed the physical and symbolic expressions that monumental architecture has on the landscape (Chris Scarre), on the communities' social order (Kalliopi Efkleidou), and on the daily practices of construction (Lesley McFayden). The common *fil rouge* is the articulated definition of monumentality as not only linked to social power and identity, but also as an outcome of people experience, accessibility and eventual use.

The second part of the book illustrates field methodologies applied to the study of monumental architecture. These contributions show the importance of quantitative methods and computer applications to collect, process and originate new data aimed at advancing field investigation of monumental architecture, post-excavation processing and analysis. Although most of these methods have been used before – often with other form of material culture –, these case studies showcase them with the specific goal of defining monumentality in context, and alongside other forms of architecture. The methods range from statistical methods such as the analysis of bimodal distribution of stone blocks during survey to identify monumental architecture (Yannick Boswinkel), to 3D photogrammetry as a tool to better understand large scale architecture encompassing multiple synchronic landscapes, such as water and land (Jari Pakkanen), and diachronic constructions while taking into account deterioration over time (Elisavet P. Sioumpara). The last paper in this section (Sofia Voutsaki, Youp van

den Beld & Yannik de Raaff) opens the discussion on the application of architectural energetics to assess various labour inputs in complex burial structures located in the cemetery of Aghios Vasilios in Greece. There is a soft critique in this paper on the more traditional approaches to architectural energetics, which are usually based on the quantification of cost in labour-time units. This critique highlights a degree of subjectivity inherently part of the labour-time approach, and presents an alternative methodology based on the quantification of labour as a relative assessment centered on a number of selected variables. Although this method could be open to the same subjectivity criticism, it introduces important denominators in the analysis of monumentality (i.e., quality of construction) expanding the study of energetics not only as an economic tool, but as a relevant source of data on social practices and possible evidence for change.

The third part of the book contextualizes architectural energetics applications through a critical assessment of archaeological case studies and develops this type of research from simple quantification into a qualitative analysis of societal responses to monumental construction practices. This section resonates particularly well with the readers for being extremely cohesive as it illustrates visibly the functionality of one specific methodology, architectural energetics as defined by DeLaine (1997), on diverse geographical and historical contexts. The results are convincing as the numbers often become a starting point to entertain a more meticulous discussion on the nature of labour organization, its socio-cultural impact and the political reverberations that monumentality entails. Daniel R. Turner discusses multiple case studies on the energetics of earthen constructions to create a successful and seemingly effective comparative approach to investigate the socio-cultural impact of monumental earthen architecture, while Maria Torras Freixa analyses the large-scale constructions in Teotihuacan as a tool to examine political and socio-economic developments of the early Tlamimilolpa phase.

The last four articles review the application of architectural energetics to diverse construction techniques, from fired bricks (Cathalin Recko) to various stone types, marble, travertine, tufo and Istrian stones (Janet DeLaine, Anna Gutierrez-Garcia & Maria Serena Vinci, Jacopo Boretto & Caterina Previato) during the Roman period. These case studies include religious, defensive, commercial and public structures, and articulate the energetics method based on clear archeological evidence into an easily comprehensive and engaging language that makes these case studies highly appealing also for non-specialist readers. Furthermore, DeLaine

and Gutierrez-Garcia & Vinci's contributions highlight an interestingly research progression where energetics become the first step into defining social dynamics as the presence of skilled labour force, funding sources and social status of the stakeholders. The article by Recko picks up on this research trend, but further expands on it by not only breaking down the complex and articulated construction processes involved in Roman buildings and technology, but also clarifying the link between specific techniques and economics while presenting multiple quantifying approaches.

The book as a whole provides a strong coherent interdisciplinary archaeological discussion to the study of monumentality, offering various perspectives and bridging the gap between architectural energetics and anthropology of architecture. The inclusion of an accurate quantification of labour costs for different type of materials and construction techniques makes this volume a must-read for any scholar involved in building archaeology. The meticulous research, comprehensive bibliographies and richness of case studies enhance the volume's potential to become a clear guide for future research projects on the topic of monumentality, economics and past construction processes. Finally, *Constructing monuments, perceiving monumentality and the economics of building* is a welcome and timely contribution to the field and a strong advocate of interdisciplinary research in building archaeology.

References

- DeLaine, J. (1997). *The Baths of Caracalla: A Study in the Design, Construction and Economics of Large-scale Building Projects in Imperial Rome*. (Journal of Roman Archaeology Suppl. Ser., 25). Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology.
- Osborne, J. F. (ed.). (2014). *Approaching monumentality in archaeology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Trigger, B. G. (1990). Monumental architecture: A thermodynamic explanation of symbolic behavior. *World Archaeology*, 22(2), 119-132. DOI: 10.1080/00438243.1990.9980135

Dr Marta Lorenzon

Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires
University of Helsinki
P.O. Box 4, Fabianinkatu 24
Helsinki, Finland
Marta.Lorenzon@helsinki.fi

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4747-5241>